

A Toolkit for Improved

LETTERS TO MESSAGES

Visual Communication

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A Toolkit for Improved Visual Communication

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at the right time

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to inspire, educate and assist anyone who is using visual communication as a part of their work, but – like me – lacks a formal education in graphic design. The reader will achieve better visuals through an understanding of perception and interpretation and including deliberate decision making in their design process. The principles of this book can be applied to digital, printed and online work – e.g. portfolios, posters, publications, presentations and personal marketing material.

The design problem under assessment is irrational and misleading visuals. Throughout my university studies in design, I have observed dysfunctional designs due to a lack of understanding of how much visuals affect communication. How to approach visual communication is not in a key role in our curricula, yet it is a vital part of the documentation and presentation of our work. Visual communication acts as a business card, leaving a visual impact of the designer's personal expression and skills.

In-depth knowledge is not unconditionally essential for students of other fields than graphic design. However, it does bring a big advantage and is an appreciated skill with practical applications, especially throughout the field of design.

This book's goal is to offer a concise yet thorough overview of subjects that are the necessary building blocks of visual communication. These subjects are semiotics, typography and composition. We will be looking into the process of creating visual communication – starting from the initial ideation, moving on through style choices, assembly of the elements into a finished end product, and its destination context.

The illustrations of the book help communicate complex abstract concepts and show the practical consequences of adjustments to attributes by giving comparisons. Diverse materials and techniques showcase both haptic and optic properties, to underline the impact of medium and sensations. The aesthetic goals of this work are to inspire, excite and bring out the beauty of functional, smart and witty design.

My personal objectives are to develop a foundation for my professional portfolio through defining my designer identity and my perspective, together with further exploring my personal expression. I hope to gain new insight to support my current skill set, and to also investigate by which means more rational approaches to graphic design become feasible, instead of using intuition alone as the basis for design decisions.

There are multiple typographic styles in the text, each with a meaning of their own. A neon highlight indicates that said expression can be found in 'Vocabulary and terminology', or in 'Cheat Sheets', if it is a typographic term. Lilac highlights clarify which parts of the text are my personal additions. Underlining is used if there is an illustration relating to the text. References are made with the Vancouver system, where sources are numerally marked and listed on the bottom of each page, with a complete listing in the 'References' section.

Vocabulary and terminology

Presumed knowledge: Design thinking and user focus will be used as the decision motivation basis – in case you are unfamiliar with these theories, please visit <https://experience.sap.com/skillup/introduction-to-design-thinking/> for an introduction to design thinking and the iterative process.

This listing follows order of appearance, not alphabetical order.

Elements are parts of a complete piece. There are several ‘levels’ of elements in a work, meaning that e.g. a single glyph can be an element in a text block in one level, meanwhile the text block it is situated in is an element on the next level. Synonyms: Object, unit, single motif, center, module, glyph, text block

Entities are the complete pieces built on elements. Synonyms: Whole, work, arrangement, layout, page, design, end product

Synonyms of *context* include circumstances, framework, background, ideological setting, pre-existent knowledge, end-use environment

Communication in its most simple form is an exchange of information. Here it is used as deliberate conveying of messages in a visual form, meaning intentional sending of information as type based designs.

A *sign*, *symbol*, *cue* and *indicator* are essentially all the same: Signals, representations or replacements of something else.

Interpretation is what the individual makes out of received information.

Conventions are norms, standards and traditions dictated by the needs of the average. A related term is '*pragmatic*', which can be defined as a practical and sensible approach.

Examples could be:

Convention – We do not use the Windings typeface for writing text, as the symbols do not resemble the alphabet's characters, and would therefore be very difficult to read.

Pragmatic – We would use a slightly larger character size in order to improve conveying of the message when making material targeted at elderly people, as they tend to have poorer eyesight than the average user.

Typography is a branch of graphic design, and deals with the appearance of type and arranging it into designs.

A *process* is, figuratively speaking, a series of steps towards a known or unknown destination. In creative work, the process is often quite irregular in terms of time spent on each stage. We will try to achieve a process of user focus and motivated decisions.

Iteration in design refers to the creative process, when it includes multiple reassessments which define the direction. Common stages of iteration are ideation, sketching, prototyping, testing, evaluation, repetition – meaning that the process is repeated for improvement of the design, starting from ideation.

Ideation is the conscious generation of ideas, as with brainstorming.

Perception is the ability to receive information of our surroundings through our senses. However, here it is used mainly as sight, and the individual's personal experience of processing optically transmitted images.

Modularity, see 'Grids and modularity'

SIGNIFICANT SIGNS: SEMIOTICS

We will begin by getting to know the principles of communication and interpretation. This chapter explores the processes behind interpretation of intended meanings within decoded messages.

SIGNIFICANT SIGNS: SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is the study of signs, or, in other words, the theory behind the interpretation of indicators. Signs – like cues or symbols – are means of communication that signify instead of carrying a direct meaning. Since signs are not literal and the understanding of signs is based on association, they are always dependent on their context.¹

Messages are bundles of information, composed by a sender and deciphered by a receiver. The included and interpreted information may or may not be intentional, just as the sending of a message itself may be accidental.² In this thesis, the concept of messages is used as a synonym for the embedded content of visual communication or parts of it.

Semiotics takes many forms: We make interpretations through linking properties, linking notions, implications of presence and partial representation. It all boils down to making sense of reference when implying something – does your message come across correctly?³ There is a vast terminology connected to semiotics including analogy, metaphor, icon, index, symbol, simile, metonym, synecchdote, and many more. Knowing the definition of these, however, is not essential for understanding the structures behind semiotics. Therefore we will focus on only a few key concepts rather than the vocabulary.

¹ Hall 2012: 5-12

² Hall 2012: 129-130

³ Hall 2012: 21-48

Interpretation of intended meanings

Denotation and connotation are the essentials of interpretation. The denotation is the literal content of an element, while the connotation is concerned with how the representation and portrayal can be interpreted.¹ Study the following pictures, and answer the question “What is in it?”. The answer for both pictures and thereby the denotation here is “A dog between bed-sheets”. But what the connotation is answers the question “How is it portrayed?”. You can notice a difference in lighting and focal point of the lens – what associations and emotions are these variations creating? Furthermore, what intentions of the maker are they communicating and what does the motif communicate depending on cultural context? The meanings we read into the depiction are connotations.

Exercise: Let us take a look at the importance and potential of semiotics. Say you are trying to find an object to illustrate a message with. Usually we are quite hasty with deciding a suitable symbol for the attributes we want to emphasise. Still, it is easy to forget that other associations already exist, and these can potentially distort your message. Get yourself a piece of paper, a pen and a timer set to two minutes. Write down as many direct* associations you can think of for the noun hidden in the envelope.

Direct

Madonna: Jesus, Da Vinci, pop music, glitter, virgin, the Bible, clothing brand, 90's style icon

Wandering associations

Scientology: pastafarianism > religion > Martin Luther >
Martin Luther King Jr. > civil rights movement

* Avoid wandering off in further associations

¹ Hall 2012: 133-134



Contextual coding and decoding

Gonzales Crisp emphasises the importance of the connection between semiotics and design. She claims that rules should be seen as “components of larger systems”, further explaining that we need to know the systems – social structures, cultures, norms – behind the rules in order to apply and alter the rules in our work.¹

Encoding is expressing something in a different form: ‘Translating’ a message into something else. Decoding is the interpretation of encoded messages.

Encode content -> Decode message = Communication

How interpretations are made is vastly dependent on culture and personal experience. Hall states “... all messages are coded, and all codes can be decoded ...”.² If we know the code, we are able to intuitively decipher the content of the message.³

How well can you manage to interpret the message of the following sign: Which elements are providing cues of meanings to you?

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 8-9

² Hall 2012: 129

³ Hall 2012: 144



With your current knowledge you might be able to state the sign's partial meaning, but without its context you cannot fully know its significance and reason. We can, obviously depending on our visual culture, rather easily conclude that it is a warning as triangles with thick stroke are a convention for that. Additionally, the human symbol indicates that there is an action to be aware of – it looks like it could be either falling or the takeoff in a running competition. In order to understand the written word we would need to know its language. Furthermore, there seems to be a signifier for an object, the smaller triangle.

‘Slang’ is Swedish and means tube, but ‘slang’ also means hose, pipe and informal language. The actual context is that this sign is used in Sweden as a warning for a tube crossing the sidewalk, and is intended to make pedestrians aware of the risk for tripping. The smaller triangle could either signify the trapezium shaped cover used to protect the tube or it could signify the action-effect related danger as an abstract concept. What makes this sign a good example of difficultly interpreted symbols is its dependence on context – foreign languages, words with multiple meanings and unclear signifiers demand context as a basis for decoding.

Coding and decoding cannot be viewed as a linearly predictable sender-to-receiver process, since the interpretations are always affected by personal associations. The result can never be fully controlled and such a thing as ‘miscommunication’ does not really exist, instead the conveying of a message has “varying degrees of success in relation to their intentions”.¹

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 89

Complexity of message

If we consider the message transparent, i.e. straightforward and sincere, we might not invest effort into further decoding, meaning that parts of it – like puns and cleverness – stay hidden and miss their target.¹ Witty ideas may easily be lost on a passive or distracted audience, meanwhile too obvious solutions are not equally appreciated.

Irony and certain types of humour are approaches that require pre-existent tools for interpretation.² You have the opportunity to be smart and make an impact when you put effort into conveying your message and considering its context. Invest time for research, take advantage of the knowledge you have and tailor your work to match its target.

¹ Hall 2012: 129

² Hall 2012: 60

DESIGN DECISIONS

In this chapter, we will focus on our audience, by understanding their needs, expectations and desires. We investigate visual elements of communication through style choices and typography.

DESIGN DECISIONS

Since the early modernists of the 20th century beginning, typographers are no longer merely making text into legible and pleasing layouts, they are now superior “information engineers”.¹ This chapter will investigate the process of creating audience tailored unique designs through visual choices.

Mapping out aesthetics with mood boards

As you design typography – choosing a typeface, deciding on visual attributes and working with composition – you will need to find the solutions that decode your objective in the message. A group of sensory attributes that are generally experienced as a particular visual style create an aesthetic.² An example of an aesthetic could be ‘romantic cottage’ with white wood, Rococo mimicking furniture, rosy pink, script and serif fonts, beige linen and sheer cotton.

One approach is to define what you are looking for and especially what not. Do intersections of the themes emerge? Collect keywords and a visual mood board, but be very careful to find the accurate synonyms – both written and visual – for your ideas in order to avoid forgetting your initial brief or misinterpretation on others’ behalf. Mood boarding clarifies motives and helps with communicating the ideation process outwards.

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 97

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 18





ATHLETIC

adjective

1. physically active and strong;
good at athletics or sports:
an athletic child.
2. of, like, or befitting an athlete.
3. of or relating to athletes;
involving the use of physical
skills or capabilities, as strength,
agility, or stamina:
athletic sports; athletic training.

WWW.DICTIONARY.COM // 29.3.2018



liking play, prone to play frequently.
Actually, we are pretty playful in our romantic life.

funny, humorous, jesting, frolicsome.
A party hat is a playful conical hat people wear at parties.

fun, recreational, not serious.
A brainteaser is a playful puzzle posed as a test of intelligence.

playful
ü

experimental.
He was a rather playful artist.



Meeting and dodging expectations

Your decisions as a designer need to be based on the production, application and function of the work. The questions in this map provide some grounds for ideating execution methods.¹

WHAT format ad flyer gif jpg pdf website social media account

WHEN span of time lenght of viewing display & campaign duration

WHERE place physical environment embedded digitally online platforms

HOW method newspaper f2f distribution Google Ads FB Instagram

When working with visual messages we need to consider the duality of form and content: The visual work itself, and its container or boundaries. The classic best case scenario is when these form a coherence that melts the two together. But the current direction of Western communication strategies seems to move towards innovative combinations, where each carry meanings of their own, creating a richer message. Unexpected or unusual approaches regarding channels or contrary aesthetics and message are methods of shaking things up.²

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 38

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 28-29

This, however, is a risky game – you could enchant and fascinate your audience – or the effect might be the opposite and they will discard your message as uninteresting, intimidating or distasteful. The odd deviation disrupting conventional rhythm might improve communication, but the effect is contained within the novelty of that deviation. It is possible take advantage of, but easier to abuse. The differentiation grows accordingly to what angle is used and to which extent, i.e. how extreme the gap between the themes is and how prominently it is used. The question is whether it is in your benefit to stand out.

By knowing your audience within their contexts – physical environment, personal values and social setting – you will be able to target them specifically and convey the message successfully.¹ Gonzales Crisp gives an example of a text heavy advert in public transport: The ordinary passerby will likely ignore this wall of text, but the daily commuter might investigate the ad thoroughly over time, as they run across the ad repeatedly.² Promotion of, for example, a local service could be very successful with this method.

You might need separate approaches to attract different audiences. The ones who are already familiar with you will probably be looking for plain information, whilst new customers can be lured in with a visually more liberated approach, which the old ones might miss.

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 29

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 39

³ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 18-25

Aa

Aa

Aa

Aa



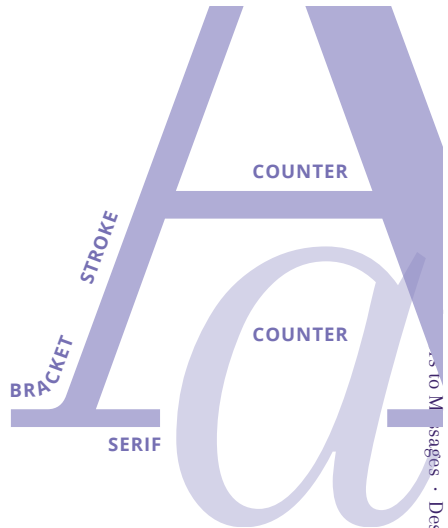
SANS SERIF

SERIF
WITH BRACKETSFONTS
IN TYPEFACESLAB SERIF
MISSES BRACKETS

A font is a variation within a typeface or a font family. Fonts are built by glyphs with modular attributes that constitute in creating a sense of visual coherence throughout the typeface.³

Serifs are the terminals that sans serif typefaces miss. Serifs come with and without brackets, which are the curved slopes between the stroke and the serif. If the brackets are missing, the typeface is a slab serif.³

The overall appearance of the typeface is dependent on the relationships within the single glyph. Thickness of stroke and the shape of the counter are the two main bases to start with – from these we can analyse the counter-to-stroke and stroke-width ratios.³



You can make parts of the message
stand out by *adding features* to a
certain part. **This highlighting** can be
made with bolding, italics,
underlining, SMALL CAPS or colour.

LEFT ALIGNMENT

You can make parts of the message
stand out by adding features to a
certain part. This highlighting can
be made with bolding, italics, under-
lining, small caps or colour.

LEFT JUSTIFICATION, TRACKING 0

You can make parts of the message
stand out by adding features to a
certain part. This highlighting can
be made with bolding, italics, under-
lining, small caps or colour.

RIGHT ALIGNMENT

You can make parts of the message
stand out by adding features to a
certain part. This highlighting can
be made with bolding, italics, under-
lining, small caps or colour.

LEFT JUSTIFICATION, TRACKING -25

**You can make parts of the message
stand out by adding features to a certain
part. This highlighting can be made
with bolding, italics, underlining, small
caps or colour.**

Basic typographic conventions

Your message always faces a reader.¹ And this gives us the basis for the most essential quality in type: How well a text can be read, aka legibility. Legibility is dependent on multiple factors, and these often vary with context. The shape of the glyphs, type size and the text mass are basic properties to start with. Furthermore, margins, justification and spacing also affect legibility and rhythm.² Generally speaking you can choose a less legible family for titles, whereas the text body should be easier to glance through.

Long texts are generally set in a serif – not sans serif, italics or a decorative typeface – with either left alignment or left justification.³ Right alignment complicates reading as the beginning of each line becomes more difficult to find.⁴ Emphasis is usually conducted with italics, bolding, underlining, highlighting or small caps.⁵

Thin width of stroke may demand more tracking to improve legibility, whereas a bold variation can be quite concisely spaced. Each text unit needs to be treated within intended application as typeface, size, line spacing, tracking, colour and layout all affect legibility and interpretations of encoded meanings.⁶

* There is a difference between true and forced small caps. Forced small caps are created by using the basic uppercase glyphs, which are shrunk to the height of the lowercase glyphs. This results in the small caps having a thinner weight compared to the lowercase glyphs and therefore not looking balanced together. True small caps, on the other hand, are made to have the right weight in proportion to the lowercase size. Unfortunately true small caps are usually not included in system typefaces, and need to be enabled through separate font files.

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 64

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 73-74, 112-115

³ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 112-116

⁴ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 87

⁵ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 71

⁶ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 113

Pragmatic and pleasing

Whenever we engage with text, we encounter hidden necessities and desires. Necessities are the pragmatic needs that set the framework for information accessibility. Desires, on the other hand, open the door for enchantment and pleasure.¹ We need to make out items, their prices and allergens on a restaurant menu, but we also want to linger in the moment, discuss the options with our dining partner and be tempted by delicious descriptions.

Necessities and desires are present in all involved stakeholders: the commissioner, the designer, the target group and secondary audiences. The different stakeholders' expectations are sometimes – more often than not – in conflict or include misconceptions of each other, and this is why targeted design benefits from market research, testing and iterative reassessments. Receiving and processing feedback is an extremely valuable tool for the user centered designer.

Tastes and what is experienced as aesthetically pleasing styles are highly unpredictable. We need to be aware that taste is 1) dependent by the viewer's context, and 2) constantly evolving.² What we are used to see will evoke a different reaction from something we are not expecting, and what visual styles we encounter is dictated by trends more than ever.

Until now many pragmatic conventions have been dictated by production limitations and optimisation of processes – e.g. black ink is the most cost efficient, unpigmented paper likewise.³ An interesting thought is just how much our reading conventions will change and develop with the digital era as old motives are replaced with new needs, desires and possibilities.

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 98

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 110-111

³ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 119

COMPOSITIONAL THEORY

Now, finally, we will look into visual communication as a comprehensive concept – how the elements form an entity, how perception is dependent on context and how to create hierarchy.

COMPOSITIONAL THEORY

Composition is the arrangement of shapes, colours and movements in a comprehensive structure. Arnheim claims that by making conscious choices the artist considers more than simple personal satisfaction, and therefore makes a bigger aesthetic contribution to the society.¹

Elements as centers in an entity

Energy and power with direction indicate properties of the motifs. Consider a vast number of classic paintings depicting Jesus and the normal mortals – very often we have our divine center defying gravity, whereas the earthly powers of gravity are violently affecting the secondary motifs. Directed energy and interaction, transmitted by the motifs, build the dynamics of the work.

Arnheim presents two alternative themes: Centric and eccentric composition.² He, however, does not evaluate their worthiness against each other, but studies their purposes and the benefits of their usage.

¹ Arnheim 1988: 1

² Arnheim 1988: 2

Both centric and eccentric composition are derived from the human mindset, and symbolise a self-centred worldview versus an outer focus. Arnheim sees masses as fields of energy that emit vectors, meaning that each motif or unit is an individual with invisible – but perceivable – intention and direction. The dominant direction depends on how much of a center of its own is perceived in the object. The perceived center changes the whole dynamics of the work.¹

The interaction of elements creates so called vectors, here illustrated as arrows, which indicate centricity or eccentricity. If the primary center stands alone, the composition is centric. When a secondary center is introduced there appears interaction and impact between the elements, and the composition becomes eccentric. Multiple elements can build a centric composition if the secondary center appears attracted by the primary center and aims its vectors towards it. Observe that dominance and centricity is illustrated with the darker tone.²

Another two alternatives are the dynamic center and the geometric center. The latter is physically the place in the middle, whereas the dynamic center is the center of energy. One variation of the dynamic center is the center of gravity. Here we find the equilibrium, the state where all influences are balanced.³

¹ Arnheim 1988: 2-12, 18, 19

² Arnheim 1988: 5

³ Arnheim 1988: 13-17



primary center

secondary center

e →

e → e

e ← e

Objects will be viewed as centric or eccentric in their context, meaning that the setting of display needs consideration. This is not as substantial regarding paintings, with their encompassing frames, but when it comes to e.g. statues that are less isolated from their context, the shift between centricity and eccentricity is more likely. The artist may have the choice to let the work share or override its visual setting. Size can be a factor that forces a shifted focus, meaning that a remarkable magnitude can make the viewer perceive themselves as eccentric, due to the work's gravitational attraction and pull.¹

Dependence of perception

Elements have a presence, meaning that they attract or avoid attention. The perception of presence can be altered through manipulation of certain attributes, which are presented further on. The idea of attracting and avoiding attention can take a special form in what could be called switch images. These include some optical illusions, stereo photos* and some of Escher's works, all demanding the viewer to use another focus in order to see the two alternate dimensions within the image, creating a feeling of switch between different levels. Switch images might be difficult to encode as they require deliberate manipulation of perception or a certain unnatural positioning of the eyes.

Gonzales Crisp supports the ideas of Arnheim, as she explains relational form. "The whole – elements and the material that supports them – will eventually have a relationship with where it is placed in the environment."²

Here she first establishes that there is an interaction – the vectors – between the elements – the centres – and additionally she brings out the physical context.

* The illustration on the opposite page is a stereo photo. See www.vision3d.com/3views.html for instructions if you are unfamiliar with the technique of viewing these images.

¹ Arnheim 1988: 24-59

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 40



She further argues that attributes of elements are always relational, i.e. proportional or perceptively dependent, to their surroundings.¹ Smaller, heavier, bluer, and so on would be the right way to express qualities, as opposed to small, heavy and blue.

Arnheim presents the Rubber Band Principle, which is based on the perception of visual weight, where the object would need to have a larger mass in order to pull an elastic band from the geometric center. Therefore an object can be seen as heavier – ergo more meaningful or more centric – if it is placed further away from the center.²

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 40

² Arnheim 1988: 21-22

Furthermore Arnheim presents the ordinary reading direction of images as being based on scanning from left to right, with a compositional departure from the left down corner and with an emphasis on the left side.¹ The rectangle and diagonal on the see-through page illustrate the location of emphasis.

Take some time to analyse the following illustration: Study centers, their vectors and visual weight.

Compositions through hierarchy

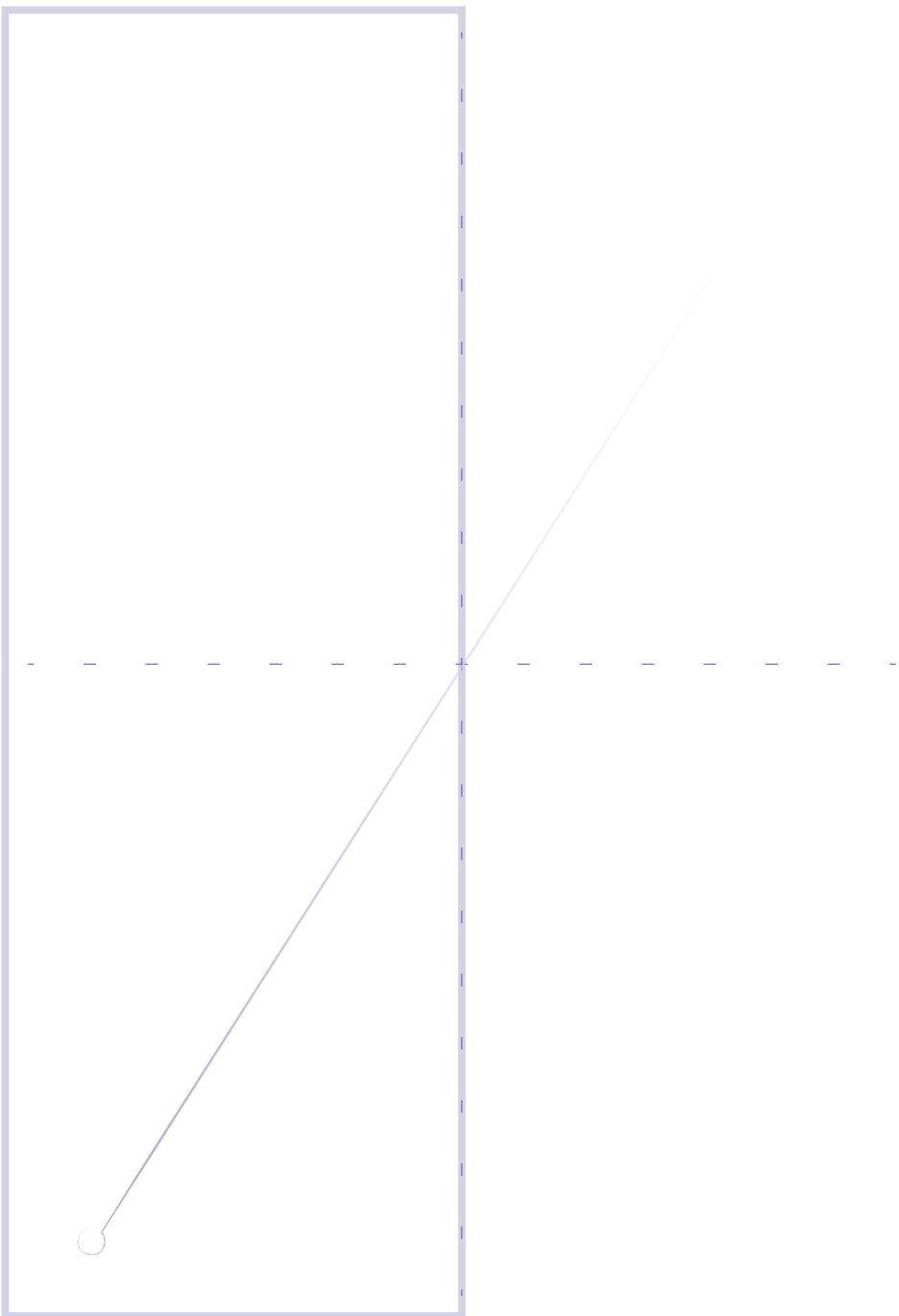
Visual hierarchy is a vital part of typographic composition and the message is altered through scale and value.² If we compile the methods of both Pearce and Hall for assigning value, we get an extensive assortment of compositional means.³

These compositional means are ways of guiding attention and can be divided into four categories: Distribution, dynamics, colour and detail.

¹ Arnheim 1988: 24

² Gonzales Crisp 2012: 47-57

³ Pearce 1947: 1-25, Hall 2012: 89





Distribution encompasses scale of elements, amount of elements, arrangement and placement. Scale and amount create emphasis, which alters and affects interpretation. *Intersecting lines, cutting edges or side breaks and their placement – the transition – are easy ways to create both interest and irritation.*

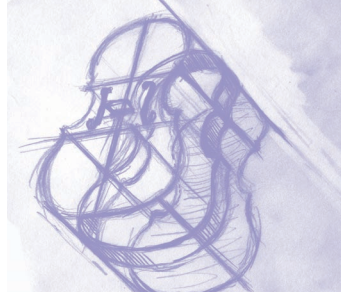
Dynamics in the composition are created through implied movement of diagonals together with position and radiation of vectors. The subject of dynamics will be further discussed in ‘Symmetry of elements and entities’.

When using *colour* in composition a small amount of an extreme tone balances a large amount of intermediates. Interesting combinations can be explored around the visual phenomenon where the perceived tone changes dependent on the background tone. *This illusion is of importance to consider when deciding on colours, as it can also cause nauseating blurriness with e.g. complementary colours.* As goes for the background, it can be either inactive or active, whereas the tones are always active. The background cannot, however, be separated from the entity.

Finally, by adding detail – through demandingness, texture and illustrations – we can halt the viewer to examine the content further.

The illustrated examples of these means present only one category at a time, in the same order as above. In practice, one would, naturally, combine multiple methods for more layers of attraction. All of these themes are relational and particular rules on how to apply them in works cannot be laid down – the designer may utilise them however they see best fit, as long as decisions have a motivation and are made intentionally.

If stroking
bare skin
produced music,
it would be
played by
a solitary
violin.



If stroking bare skin produced music,
it would be played by a solitary violin.

If stroking bare skin
produced music,
it would be played by
a solitary violin.



If stroking bare skin
produced music
it would be
played by a
solitary violin

WHERE
WOULD
LIE
THE REASON
TO EXIST
IF WE EVER
ACHIEVED OUR
COMPLETE
FORM?

IF WE EVER ACHIEVED OUR COMPLETE FORM?
WHERE WOULD LIE THE REASON TO EXIST?

WHERE WOULD LIE
THE REASON TO EXIST
IF WE EVER ACHIEVED
OUR COMPLETE FORM ?

WHERE WOULD LIE THE REASON TO EXIST
IF WE EVER ACHIEVED OUR COMPLETE FORM?

beauty

IS NOT SUPERFICIAL,
IT IS

inevitably essential.

beauty

IS NOT SUPERFICIAL,
IT IS

inevitably essential.

beauty

IS NOT SUPERFICIAL,
IT IS

inevitably essential.

beauty

IS NOT SUPERFICIAL,
IT IS

inevitably essential.

*A few
secrets
are
good for
the soul*

**A FEW
SECRETS
ARE
GOOD FOR
THE SOUL**

**A FEW
SECRETS
ARE
GOOD FOR
THE SOUL**

A FEW
SECRETS
ARE
GOOD FOR
THE SOUL

Something fast can be slowed down

by altering style,
adding detail and

using white space



Timelines and compositional velocity

Reading from left to right and from the upper section downwards implies a timeline. A few examples could include cartoons, diagrams and before-after comparisons.¹ Exceptions to this Western convention are easily found in other cultures – for instance in Japanese manga and Persian writing.

Another aspect of time in visual structures is the sense of speed. Some ways to manipulate the sensed velocity are style, colour, composition, spacing and illustrations.²

Reading systems have changed dramatically since the information flow and accessibility has increased with the internet. People skim through material with a clear expectation of where to find the information that they are looking for – whereas previously they would be more likely to engage in sustained reading.³ Luckily, this does not mean that we lack the skills for interpretation of complex structures, nor the appreciation for them. What it does mean is that we need to acknowledge our audience's needs, and can choose to offer either:

1) Fast-food: quick, easily attained and logically structured information

2) Wine and dine: a delightful experience of time consuming treasure hunting

The following two pages illustrate a disrupted and a conventional approach to reading structures. Make an effort to discard your expectations of order before turning the pages, so that you can view both illustrations with an open mindset. Are you able to make sense of the compositional hierarchy?

¹ Hall 2012: 108

² Hall 2012: 108

³ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 66-88

"It is your own fault," said the little prince. "I never wished you any sort of harm; but you wanted me to tame you..."
"Yes, that is so," said the fox.
"But now you are going to cry!" said the little prince.
"Yes, that is so," said the fox.
"Then it has done you no good at all!"

"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread.

Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat..."
The fox gazed at the little prince, for a long time.

"I cannot play with you," the fox said.
"I am not tamed."

"Ah! Please excuse me," said the little prince.
But, after some thought, he added:
"What does that mean – tame?"

"It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. "It means to establish ties."

"To establish ties?"

"Just that," said the fox. "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes.

But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world..."

*"It has done me good,"
said the fox,*

*"because of the colour of
the wheat fields."*

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER 21 OF
'The Little Prince'
BY ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

"I cannot play with you," the fox said.
"I am not tamed."

"Ah! Please excuse me," said the little prince. But, after some thought, he added: "What does that mean – tame?"

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"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow.

And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat..."

The fox gazed at the little prince, for a long time.

*"It is your own fault," said the little prince.
"I never wished you any sort of harm; but
you wanted me to tame you..."*

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

*"But now you are going to cry!" said the
little prince.*

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"Then it has done you no good at all!"

*"It has done me good," said the fox,
"because of the colour of the wheat fields."*

Both have their time and place and create different value. As Gonzales Crisp states: “...always recognise rules as traditions and tastes, motivated by pragmatic and aesthetic concerns.”¹ Confusing your viewer can be a way to enchant, but this is probably the most efficient in a solitarily aesthetic and pleasing composition, where the viewer is not annoyed by the investment of time to achieve an understanding.²

Symmetry in elements and entities

Symmetry is about distinguishing between what is constant and what is not.³ It is realising and isolating patterns. There are different kinds of symmetries, but the fundamental idea is forming an entity by the repetition of an element. There is so called basic symmetry – usually referred to as static symmetry – in addition to which, there is dynamic symmetry.

Static symmetry is built on direct replication of visual elements and the methodical arrangement of these units around a center or plane.⁴ Hambidge claims that static symmetry is a spontaneous and primitive visual approach, and surely, it is easily created and detected.⁵ This, however, does not mean that repetition per se is inferior or disgraceful. Hambidge’s claim is based on the usage of static symmetry in fine arts, whereas we – as designers – are fully justified to use it for e.g. pattern making, layout design and illustrations.

It is notable, though, that dynamic compositions and asymmetry tend to seize more attention than arrangements based on static symmetry.⁶

¹ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 78

² Hall 2012: 89-90, 103-108

³ Senechal 1974: 91

⁴ Hambidge 1926: xiii

⁵ Hambidge 1926: xii, xiii

⁶ Gonzales Crisp 2012: 60

The theory of dynamic symmetry is based on the Golden Ratio. The Golden Ratio, phi, is created through the summation series 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144 ... where each number is the sum of its two predecessors.

The series is eternal, and so are patterns based on it, growing endlessly in both directions. When we divide any given number in the series with its predecessor, except 2 with 1, we get the value 1.618. This value is used for creating a pattern of growth, and it is this pattern which is the symmetry presented in the theory of Hambidge. We can use it for building golden rectangles, which can be further developed to a golden spiral and diagonals for assigning dynamic movement.¹

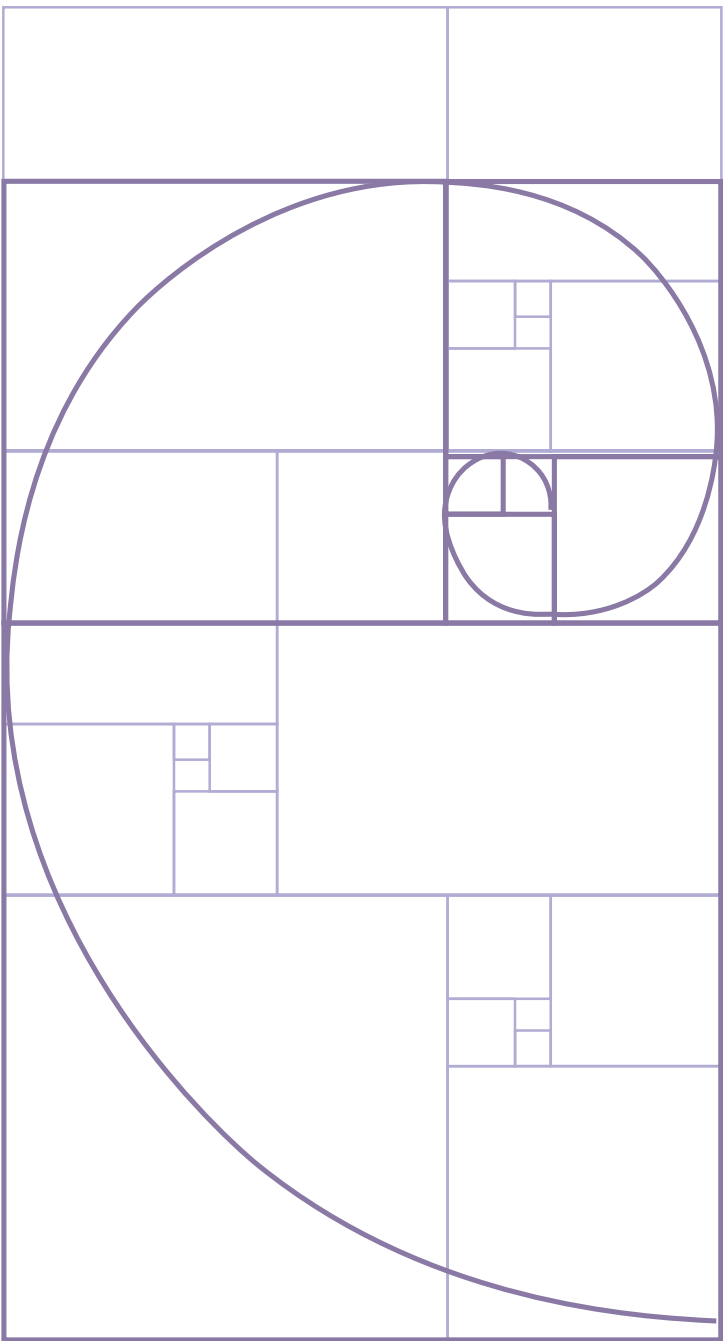
Usage of 'dynamic':

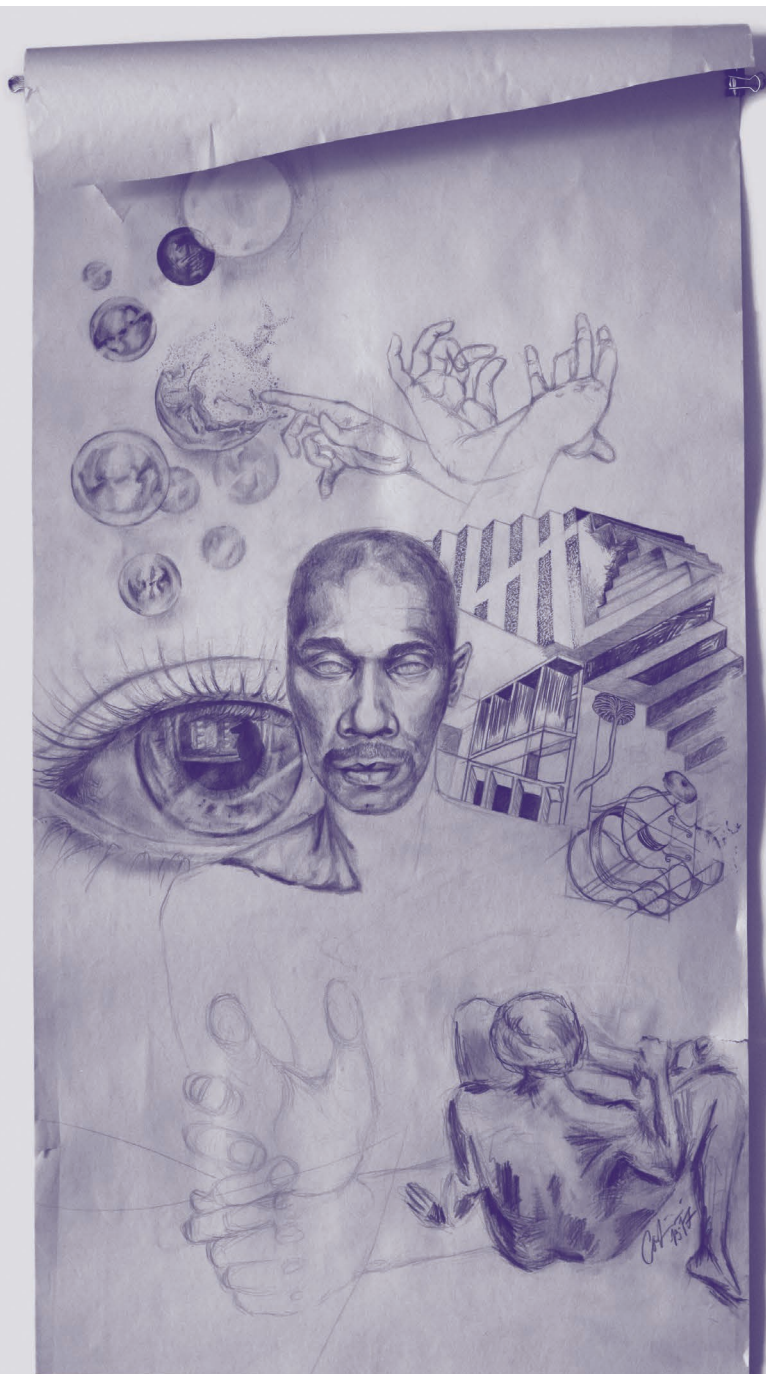
1. *Dynamic symmetry* is conceptual, i.e. the symmetry is theoretical, as in utilising a summation series for composition

2. *Implied movement*, through diagonals and position, is usually experienced as dynamic

3. *Compositions* are mainly perceived as either dynamic or static. Dynamic compositions are usually built on both dynamic symmetry, translated to the golden ratio, and dynamic movement within the entity.

¹ Hambidge 1926: 3-4, 6-8, 42





Dynamic symmetry is either accidental or requires knowing the principles.¹ Unlike static symmetry, dynamic symmetry is about arranging members of an organism – meaning that shape- and sizewise different parts are given a place in an entity, as opposed to placing visually corresponding elements in a repetitive pattern. This is the basis and thesis of dynamic symmetry.

Hambidge argues that art is superior when conscious use of rules is applied, and when the underlying schemes are based on arithmetical principles rather than simple geometrics.²

Grids and modularity

Language, words and letters are modular. Grids and modules can be used in almost any visual work, but become increasingly important dependent on format and application. Magazines and publications are examples of these formats, whereas an application for usage of modules and grids is production of brand based material. Without visual coherence these would seem disordered and more difficult to relate to their origin.

A module, according to Ehrenkranz, is "... a conceptual framework to operate in, rather than a specific dimension or grid ... [modules] relate to one another like notes on the musical keyboard."³

This is quite an accurate definition of modules for our needs, as design work always calls for compromises to rules in order to achieve the best possible outcome for both the single element and the entity. Defining too strict rules for oneself, as well as discarding all guidelines, might result in the same unsuccessful bad design.

¹ Hambidge 1926: xv

² Hambidge 1926: xii, xvi

³ Ehrenkrantz 1966: 118

SUMMARY

The main conclusions to be drawn from the reviewed theories are related to context, interpretation and usability.

The context – as final usage environment and pre-existent background of the audience – should be considered a defining factor throughout the process. Interpretation of visual communication is always subjective and affected by e.g. the viewer's mindset, cultural background and personal taste. Visual interpretation is based on perception of properties, and encoding should include all elements of the entity. There are some established pragmatic rules based on usage comfortability and neutrality. Therefore, the designer needs to assess whether it is purposive and motivated to discard these rules, if they intend to do so.

Evaluation of work

A draft of the text was reviewed by Art Education Master's Degree student Christina Lassheikki. Based on Lassheikki's comments, the 'Vocabulary and terminology' section was introduced and some paragraphs were further elaborated. The language and vocabulary remains, however, quite complicated, meaning that the content can be rather challenging to take in.

The visual layout together with usability was assessed by Design Bachelor Annika Silvennoinen.

According to her evaluation the book's visual attributes are pleasing and coherent, inviting the reader to further investigation of the text matter. The exercises create an appreciated interruption in the reading, as does the diversity of materials and textures. I observed some confusion on her behalf at pages 30-36, and after a discussion of the problem's cause, the reading path was altered to make the purpose of the illustrations clearer.

Possible areas of improvement are dependent on intentions. According to the set objectives, this format and execution is rather functional. However, there is some discontinuity in the formality of language and the broad subject offers little depth. Nevertheless, these shortcomings do have motivations: The conversational tone creates a more open and equal ambience as the whole idea is to introduce design related themes and provoke thought, rather than offer ready-made guidelines.

The illustrations are fewer than initially intended and have not gotten quite as much finishing attention as they could have. Unfortunately, no test printings were made, and therefore the 'personal additions' highlighting is not readjusted to have a clearer distinction from the body text.

Personal benefit

This process has been immensely rewarding: The choice of subject and execution has offered such a vast amount of moments of thrill and epiphanies.

In practice, the work found a balance of slow development, with sudden peaks of panic-powered productivity and a golden middle way of active processing and sustained focus. It has strengthened my confidence in design processes being fruitful and brought forth the benefits of slowly progressing iteration.

Furthermore, the process has reinforced my understanding for the lack of absolute truths in design, and the positive aspects of this. As the value of context, desires and personal taste have been elevated in my eyes, I feel that I will be able to create more valuable visual experiences for others.

Quite a large portion of design decisions are made with a silently informed intuition, which is not invalid in any sense. Personally though, I have felt insecure about my decisions as I have lost grasp of what parts of my silent knowledge are based on previous learning, what stems from personal taste and what choices simply lack any motivations.

The objective was to assess whether these intuitive decisions can be rationalised. The theories in this thesis have confirmed that most of my intuitive preferences have a motivation from previous learning, as e.g. my compositional taste being based on introduction to the Golden Ratio at a visual arts hobby club in the beginning of elementary school. There are, however, no universal rules, only approaches, to base decisions on.

The whole book – typography, layout, materials and illustrations – matches my design values and is an honest sample of my aesthetic. Therefore it will make an essential addition to my portfolio, and has subjectively a larger importance and more practical application than many other theses have for their makers.

Recommendations

This thesis became an information package of high density, where the best bits of seven credible books and essays are communicated efficiently through text and illustrations. As the content is rather heavy, it is highly recommendable to read the book over time and with thought, possibly twice for the added learning through repetition.

It is notable, though, that no shortcuts to an aesthetically developed eye exist. Whenever visual presentations are made, it would be beneficiary for students to get honest feedback for their graphic work. Getting away with unmotivated choices is not favourable for the individual's professional development. If the expectation, in our education and field, is that we have skills within graphic design, then it should also have a more central role – or at least be more accessible to embed – in our curricula.

Readers can easily find further information on all subjects in libraries, especially in field specific collections like the Harald Herlin Learning Centre in Espoo. Additional themes to examine are semantics, color theory, style history and current visual trends.

Learning the softwares is highly dependent on practise and getting to know the logic of the programs' structures. As you learn their code, the usage will become intuitive and you will find Google a good support when looking for specific tools and commands. Make an effort to learn the keyboard shortcuts for the most common commands, as this makes the work substantially more efficient.

**OUR BEST FRIEND IS A CURIOUS MIND
AND A LOVE FOR EPIPHANIES.**

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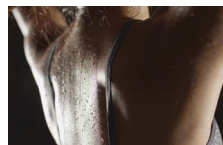
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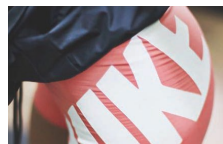
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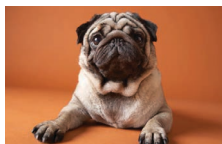




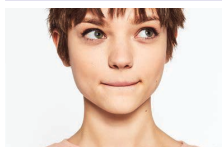
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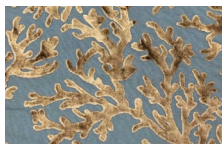
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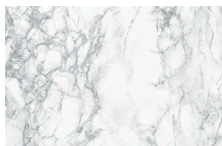
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Typeface listing

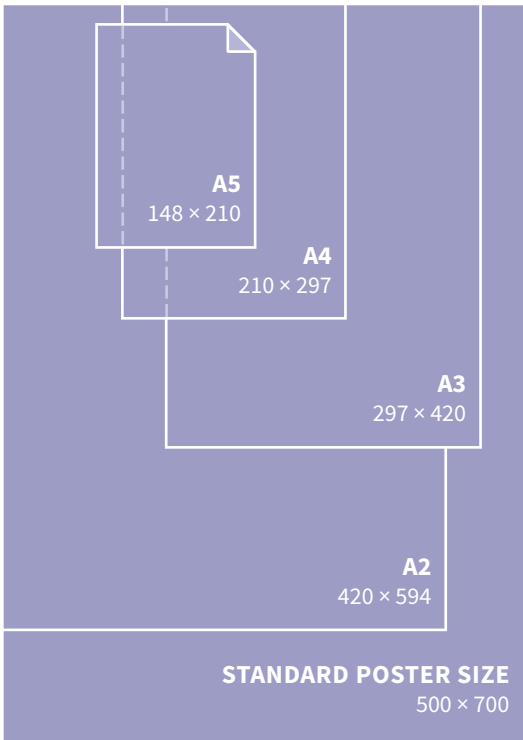
Document typefaces, Source Sans Pro and Arapey, with layout styles are showcased in ‘Cheat Sheets’. Both of these families are available on fonts.google.com.

Most of the used typefaces are available for free online, on either dafont.com or fonts.google.com. There are some exceptions of fonts that come as Mac system fonts or are enabled through Adobe’s Typekit service.

p. 31	Prisma & Helvetica
p. 33	筑紫A丸ゴシック & Muli
p. 35	Yrsa & Adobe Caslon Pro
p. 59	Broadcast Matter
p. 60	Avenir Next Condensed
p. 61	Bodoni 72 Oldstyle
p. 62	Scriptina Pro & Phosphate & Balans & Cocotte
p. 64	Helvetica Neue & Arapey

CHEAT SHEETS

This section includes a few terms and practical tips that may come in handy when working with graphic design.



The used units depend on intended distribution channel: Print material is defined in millimetres (mm), digital in pixels (px).

In both cases the dimensions are given as width × height.

The convention for Adobe's programs is to utilise InDesign for print material, Photoshop for digital, and Illustrator for vector graphics.

72 ppi
20 × 20



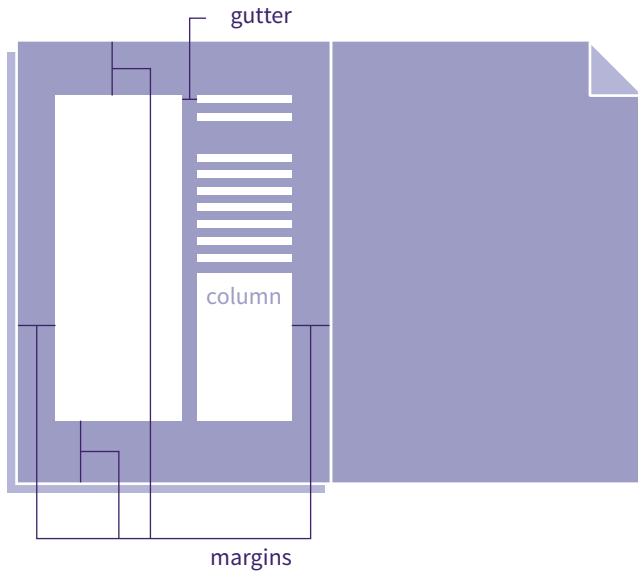
300 ppi
20 × 20



Colour spaces define by what method colours are produced. CMYK – cyan, magenta, yellow and black – is used for print, meanwhile digital work should be based on RGB – red, green and blue.

Resolution, the amount of detail, is measured as dots or pixels per inch (dpi / ppi). The higher the resolution, the heavier the file will be. Print material is usually set in a minimum of 300 dpi, while digital material use between 72 and 150 ppi.





Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing
 elit. Curabitur feugiat egestas odio, viverra luctus
 nibh pretium eget.

Nam egestas auctor felis, vel aliquet purus iaculis id.
 Etiam placerat metus et accumsan pharetra.

Aliquam justo ligula, vehicula et ante at, dignissim
 molestie ex. Curabitur et purus sollicitudin metus
 hendrerit vehicula.

Fusce ut orci iaculis sem ullamcorper
 pellentesque sit amet dui. Phasellus mattis viverra
 purus, ut feugiat libero facilisis non. Nulla facilisi.

placeholder text
 leading: line spacing
 paragraph spacing
 tracking 100
 tracking 0

no kerning

optical kerning

fbr
 fbr

The spacing between characters is called tracking, and can additionally be fine tuned with kerning. Kerning fixes distances between certain character pairs that together might seem unevenly spaced.

LOREM IPSUM DOLOR SIT

TITLES

Source Sans Pro Black 18 pt
leading 18 pt
optical kerning
tracking 50

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing

Subtitles

Arapey Italic 11 pt
leading 12 pt
optical kerning

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit morbi

Body

Arapey Regular 9 pt
leading 12 pt
optical kerning

‘Lorem ipsum’ is a commonly used placeholder text, meaning that it is a tool for planning layouts.

‘The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog’, on the other hand, is used for reviewing properties of fonts. The full sentence includes all letters of the English alphabet.

SOURCE SANS PRO by Paul D. Hunt, 2012

EXTRALIGHT	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
LIGHT	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
REGULAR	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy do
SEMIBOLD	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy d
BOLD	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy
BLACK	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy
EXTRALIGHT ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.</i>
LIGHT ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.</i>
ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog</i>
SEMIBOLD ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy do</i>
BOLD ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy d</i>
BLACK ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy d</i>

ARAPEY by Eduardo Tunni, 2011

REGULAR	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
ITALIC	<i>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.</i>

